



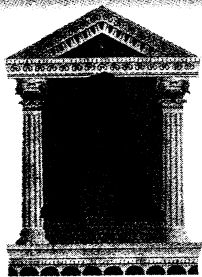
# Ancient Greece and Rome

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# 1 The Ancient Greek City-States



**Great Civilization** Many people believe that the greatest of all the civilizations of the ancient world was the civilization of Greece. In a sense, though, it is a little misleading to speak about ancient Greece as if it were a single civilization.

Ancient Greece was not a unified country but a collection of independent **city-states**. The ancient Greek word for city-state was *polis* (POH lih). A typical polis would have included a town or a small city as well as the farmlands surrounding it. Most Greek city-states had a population of no more than 20,000 and covered an area of only a hundred or so square miles.

By 500 B.C. dozens of these city-states had grown up, mainly along the shores of the Aegean Sea. Most were located in modern-day Greece, but others were scattered along the coast of **Asia Minor**, on the shores of the Black Sea, in southern Italy, and in northern Africa.

The Greek city-states had a number of things in common. First, the people of the city-states all spoke Greek, though dialects varied from city-state to city-state. (A dialect is a regional variety of a language.) The Greeks referred to non-Greek speakers as "barbarians." When

these people spoke, the Greeks could hear only meaningless syllables that sounded to them like *bar, bar, bar*.

The Greek city-states were also unified by religion. The citizens of the various city-states worshiped the same set of Greek gods. Zeus (zyoos) was the chief god, but he shared

power with other gods, including his wife Hera (HIHR uh), the sun god Apollo (uh PAHL oh), the sea god Poseidon (poh SYE dun), and the love goddess Aphrodite (af ruh DYT ee). The Greeks believed that these gods lived on Mount Olympus but came down from time to time to influence human affairs. They told marvelous mythological stories about the

adventures and misadventures of their gods. They built temples to honor their gods. Greek city-states also came together for athletic competitions like the Olympic Games, which you will read about in Lesson 4.

But each Greek city-state was also unique. Each had its own traditions, legends, and local heroes. Almost all city-states worshiped a handful of local gods along with the central gods.

Each city-state also had its own distinctive forms of government. In fact, the Greeks were so innovative when it came to government and politics that many of the words we use to talk about these subjects today can be traced back to ancient Greek words. Our words *politics* and *policeman* are both derived from the word *polis*. Politics is the art of governing a polis, or state, and a policeman is a person who helps preserve order in the state.

## vocabulary

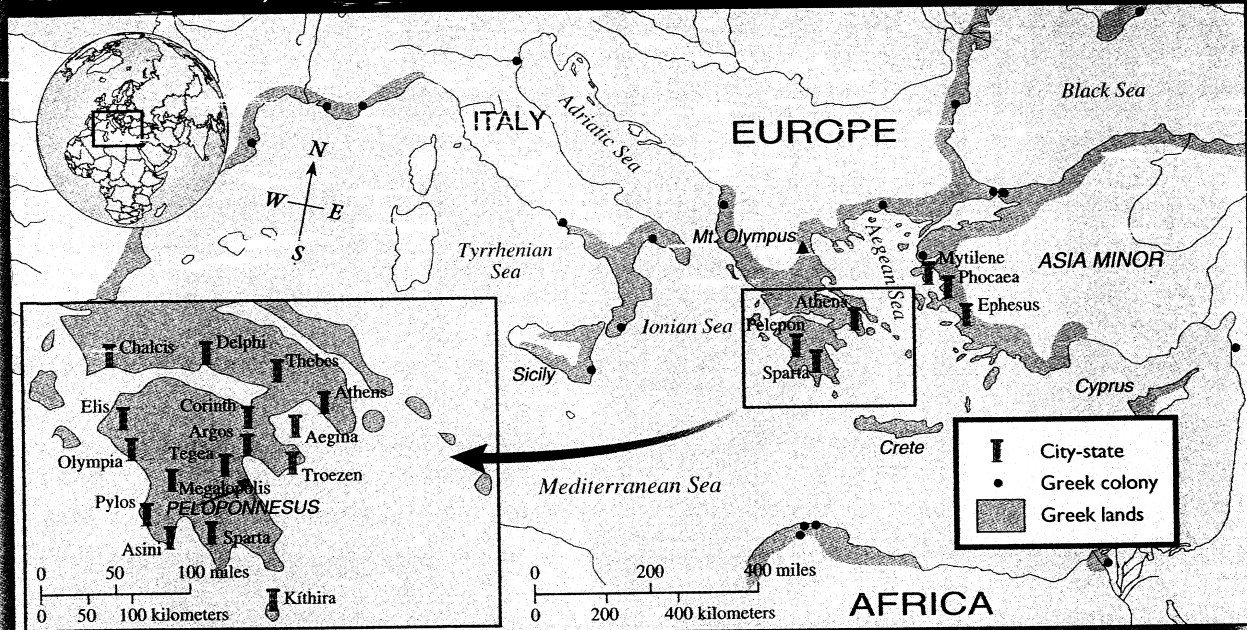
**city-state** an independent town or city that governs itself and the land around it  
**Asia Minor** another name for the Anatolian Peninsula, where much of Turkey is located

*According to Greek belief, Zeus was the ruler of Mount Olympus and the king of gods.*





## Ancient Greece, about 500 B.C.



*The Greeks established colonies throughout the Mediterranean.*

In the beginning most Greek city-states were ruled by kings. However, by 500 B.C. most city-states had adopted other forms of government, including tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy (AHL ih gahr kee), and democracy.

Tyranny was a system where one man was the dictator. For Greeks, tyranny was different from monarchy: tyrants seized power illegally, whereas kings inherited their throne legally. Some tyrants were popular because they opposed the rich and helped the poor. However, few Greeks wanted to live under tyrants all the time.

Aristocracy was a system in which a few noble or upper-class families held power. The word *aristocracy* actually means "rule of the best." Sometimes these "best" families shared power with an assembly made up of citizens, but not always.

An oligarchy was similar to aristocracy. Again, the power was held by only a few people. In fact, *oligarchy* means "rule of the few." But in this case the few were not noble families but wealthy men.

Finally, there was *democracy*. In a democracy, power was shared by a large number of citizens. Citizens took part in debates, decided government policy, and elected officials. The Greeks

seem to have been the first people to experiment with this kind of government. The experiment eventually caught on, and democracy became the pattern of government in a number of Greek city-states.

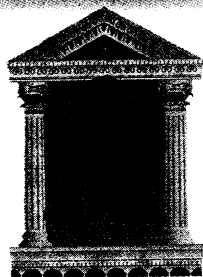
### Lack of Unity

The Greeks were proud of the independence and individuality of their city-states. They thought it was better to live under local government than under the power of a king who lived far away. However, there were also disadvantages to the city-state model. The Greek city-states were always getting into disagreements and wars, and this lack of unity made it easier for foreign countries to invade Greece. In times of crisis the city-states might join together to fight a common foe, but this was the exception, not the rule. In general, the alliances among city-states tended to be fragile and short-lived, while the rivalries among them tended to be sturdy and long-lasting.

One of the greatest rivalries was the one between Athens and Sparta. Athens and Sparta were two of the largest and most powerful of the city-states. In the next two lessons, you will learn about these two city-states and the differences between them.



## 2 Athens



**thenian Democracy** Athens was one of the largest of the Greek city-states and also one of the most democratic. Indeed, we remember it today as the birthplace of democracy.

Athenian democracy developed gradually over many decades, during which time monarchy had given way to aristocracy, aristocracy to oligarchy, and oligarchy to democracy. The Athenians also had to get rid of a few tyrants. Over the years more and more people won the right to participate in government. By 500 B.C. a recognizably democratic system was firmly established.

At the center of Athenian democracy was the Assembly. The Assembly passed laws, levied taxes, and voted on issues of war and peace. All Athenian citizens were allowed to participate in the Assembly. Before deciding on an issue, the members of the Assembly would debate the merits of the proposal. Then they would vote by holding up their hands. If a majority of those present supported the proposal, it would be accepted.

The Assembly also had the power to **ostracize**, or banish, citizens who might pose a danger to the polis. Again, this was done by voting. During ostracism votes each citizen was allowed to scratch another citizen's name on a piece of pottery called an *ostrakon*. If enough people scratched the same name, the ostracized citizen had to leave the city-state and stay away for ten years. However, he was allowed to keep his property, and at the end of ten years, he was allowed to return.

The Assembly was assisted by a smaller council, called the Boule (BOO lee), which was made up

of 500 members chosen by lot. Each member served a year-long term, and no citizen could serve more than two terms. The Boule decided which issues needed to be brought before the Assembly and which ones could be handled by other officials.

### **vocabulary**

**ostracize** in ancient Athens, to banish or send away; nowadays it means "drive someone out of social life"

### **The Legal System**

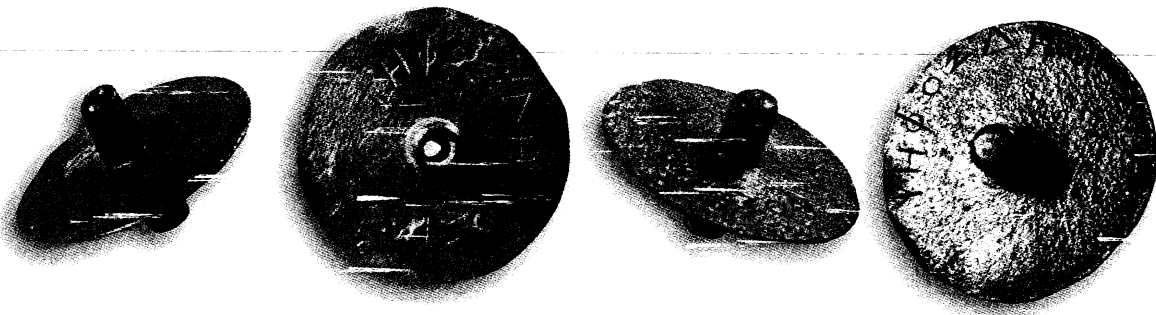
The legal system was also quite democratic. Athenian law was divided into two sections. There were public laws, which had to do with the city-state, and private laws through which people could work out their disagreements. If someone broke a public law, he would have to pay a fine or face the penalty that had been decided upon by the Assembly or by the Boule. If someone had a disagreement with a neighbor, he could take his neighbor to a law court near the marketplace and have a jury decide his case.

Athenian juries were larger than ours are today. In some cases as many as 501 citizens sat on a single jury! The idea behind these giant juries was that they would be less

susceptible to bribery and corruption: it is easier to bribe a dozen jurors than it is to pay off several hundred. Because the juries were so big, nearly all citizens served on juries at some point in their lives.



*This ostrakon had the name "Themistocles" scratched on it.*



*Jury members voted by placing tokens in a jar. Solid hubs stood for "not guilty" and hollow hubs meant "guilty."*

The fourth element of Athenian democracy was a board of ten generals known as the *strategoi* (STRAT uh goi). These generals directed the army. They were elected each year by the Assembly.

### **Limits of Athenian Democracy**

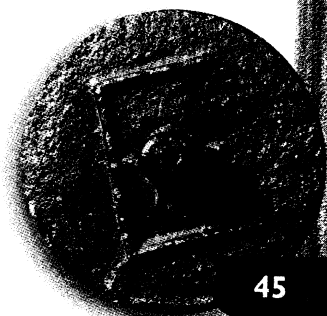
It is important to understand that Athens was not completely democratic by modern standards. You read earlier that all Athenian citizens were allowed to participate in the Assembly. However, not everyone in the polis was a citizen. To qualify as a citizen, a person had to be (1) male, (2) at least 18 years of age, (3) not a slave, and (4) the son of two Athenian parents. Women, children, slaves, and foreigners living in Athens were not citizens and so could not vote in the Assembly or serve on juries.

Although Athenian women played an important role in religious affairs, they had virtually no political rights. They could not own property and were always under the control of a man, whether it was a husband or a male relative, such as a father, brother, or even a grown-up son. This male relative decided whom the woman would marry. If her husband died, she could be remarried without her consent. Sometimes, if a husband knew he was dying, he would decide before his death whom his wife should marry next! Women could not participate in debates in the Assembly and could not attend certain public events. Girls might receive some education at home, but they were not sent to school. Instead of participating in the political life of the polis, women were expected to bear children and tend to their families. The family was very important in ancient Athens, and Athenian women were expected to uphold it.

Athens was a busy trading city that opened its doors to many foreigners. These foreign residents, known as *metics* (MET ihks), played an important role in the Athenian economy. Many metics were artisans, craftsmen, or merchants. Although some metics were presented with honorary citizenship, most never became citizens.

Slaves had it even worse. They made up as much as a quarter or a third of the population. A rich citizen might have hundreds of slaves to run his household, farm, or business. A lesser household might have between 10 and 50 slaves. Only the poor did not depend on slave labor. Slaves cleaned, shopped, cooked, carried water, washed clothing, and helped raise children. Some slaves were educated, so they could help teach the children in a family. Others might be accomplished musicians who provided entertainment. But even the most talented slaves lacked political rights. Although Athenian slaves could sometimes earn enough money to buy their freedom, they could not purchase Athenian citizenship.

Once slaves, metics, women, and children are subtracted, only about 40,000 of the 300,000 or so people living in Athens and the surrounding countryside qualified as citizens. So Athenian democracy definitely had its limits. And yet we should not dismiss what the Athenians achieved. In 500 B.C. you could not find another place where so many of the people were involved in political affairs. Later societies would carry democratic ideals even further, but it was the Athenians who took the all-important first steps.



## Athenian Education

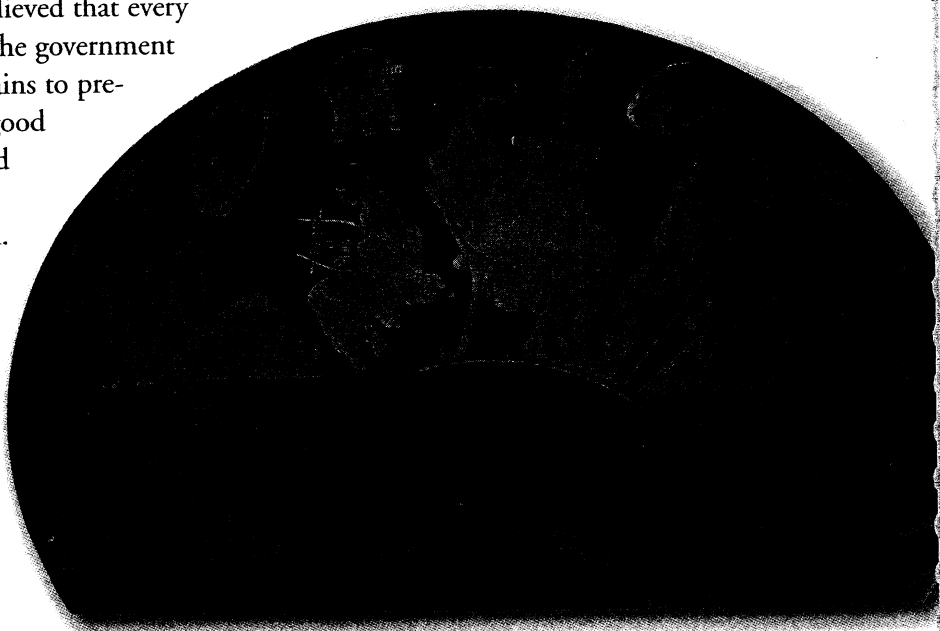
Because the Athenians believed that every citizen should play a role in the government of the city-state, they took pains to prepare young men to become good citizens. They believed a good education would benefit the polis as well as the individual.

A citizen would need to be able to take part in debates in the Assembly and law courts. He would also need to know how to argue, how to defend his own opinions, and how to criticize the ideas of others. This is why the Athenians taught their sons **rhetoric**.

Along with rhetoric, Athenian schools taught logic, reading, writing, arithmetic, and music. Boys learned to play a stringed instrument called the lyre and memorized sections from two **epic poems** attributed to the ancient Greek poet Homer, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

In addition to academic instruction, every young man was given two years of military instruction and many years of physical education. Athenian men were expected to exercise in a gymnasium. This was not an enclosed building, like a modern gym, but a parklike area outside the city where men gathered in the cool shade of the trees to exercise their bodies and relax their minds. The men exercised in the nude. In fact, the word gymnasium comes from a Greek word meaning "to exercise naked."

When an Athenian male got a little older, he might begin to attend symposiums. The symposium was a banquet or drinking party. Citizens gathered to eat, drink, listen to musicians, converse, and enjoy one another's company. Much wine was consumed, but many symposiums also had an educational purpose. When the members of a symposium settled down for conversation, the men took turns speaking on a chosen theme,



*This painted vase depicts a classroom in ancient Greece. The figures on the left are playing the lyre.*

such as love or happiness. The participants were not just gossiping or wasting time. They were sharing wisdom and reaching conclusions.

Athenian education sought to produce loyal Athenian citizens, but it also sought to produce cultured, well-rounded men who appreciated art, music, and sports. The ideal citizen would be equally comfortable on the battlefield or in the Assembly. He would be willing to follow army discipline during wartime but also willing to drink wine and eat a hearty dinner at a symposium when the war was over.

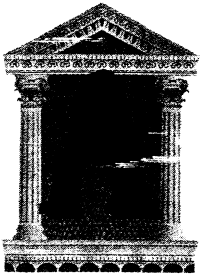
He would fulfill his political responsibilities but also pursue other interests. In short the Athenian educational system was designed to produce solid citizens and well-rounded individuals.

### vocabulary

**rhetoric** the art of using language, especially to persuade others

**epic poem** a long poem that tells the story of the adventures of one or more legendary heroes





**Military Culture** In the city-state of Sparta, less than 100 miles southwest of Athens, a very different philosophy of education prevailed. Spartans raised their children to be warriors. They had no interest in developing “well-rounded individuals,” or individuals of any sort.

Whereas the Athenians required two years of military training, the Spartans required 23! The Spartan educational system emphasized military training, almost from the cradle to the grave.

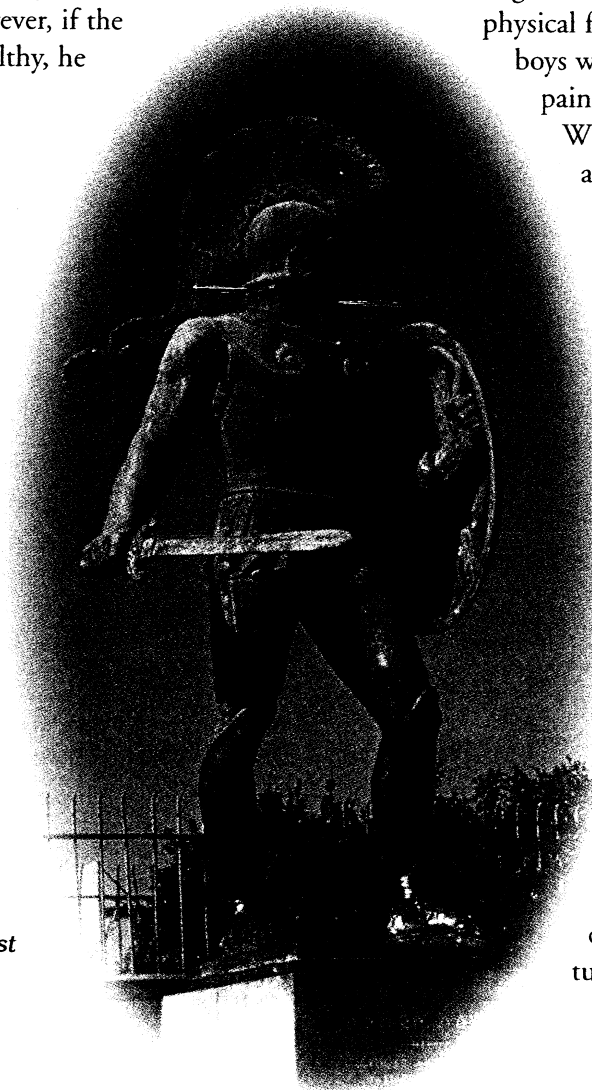
When a Spartan woman gave birth to a baby boy, the child was inspected by a government committee. If the baby was healthy and looked as if it might grow into a strong warrior, he was allowed to live. However, if the baby seemed weak or unhealthy, he was “exposed” and left outdoors to die.

The Spartans made sure children grew up to be tough. Spartan children who cried were not picked up or comforted. The Spartans believed that children who were clothed in this way would grow up to be tough. A similar objection was raised against sandals, shoes made for soft feet. Soldiers needed tough feet. Therefore, Spartan boys had to go barefoot, even in the dead of winter.

At the age of seven, Spartan boys were sent away from their families to begin military training. They lived in barracks with other boys their age and were taught to obey without question. Even the slightest questioning of authority was certain to bring a good whipping.

In Sparta, little time was spent teaching reading, writing, and poetry. Instead, physical fitness was king. Spartan boys were taught to endure great pain and never accept defeat. When the boys became teenagers, their food rations were cut so that they would have to learn to be clever and steal food for themselves.

Young men could marry at age 20, but they had to continue sleeping in the barracks until they turned 30. They had to sneak away to be with their wives, and they were punished if they got caught. Even after they moved in with their wives, they had to eat with their army unit rather than with their wives and children. Military service continued until the men turned 60.



*Spartan warriors, like the one shown here, were the best trained soldiers of their time.*

The entire Spartan state was organized as a military unit, and everyone had a role to play. Spartan women did not fight, but they had more political rights than Athenian women. They could own land, and they were encouraged to take part in foot races and other sports so that they would grow up to be healthy mothers. Once they became mothers, they were expected to help raise their sons to be warriors.

Spartan mothers had to be prepared to lose their sons in war. On hearing that her son had died in battle, one Spartan woman refused to weep. On the contrary, she announced her loss proudly: "I bore him so that he might die for Sparta, and that is what has happened, as I wished."

Why did the Spartans place so much emphasis on military skill and bravery? It was partly to protect themselves against foreign foes, of course. When someone suggested that Sparta build a wall around the city, the legendary Spartan leader Lycurgus supposedly replied that a "wall of men" would protect the city more effectively than any wall of bricks.

But there was another reason too. The Spartans ruled over large numbers of slaves called *helots*. The life of a *helot* in Sparta was much worse than the life of a slave in Athens. In fact, Spartans made fun of the Athenians for coddling their slaves. The Spartans said that in Athens, you could hardly tell the slaves from the

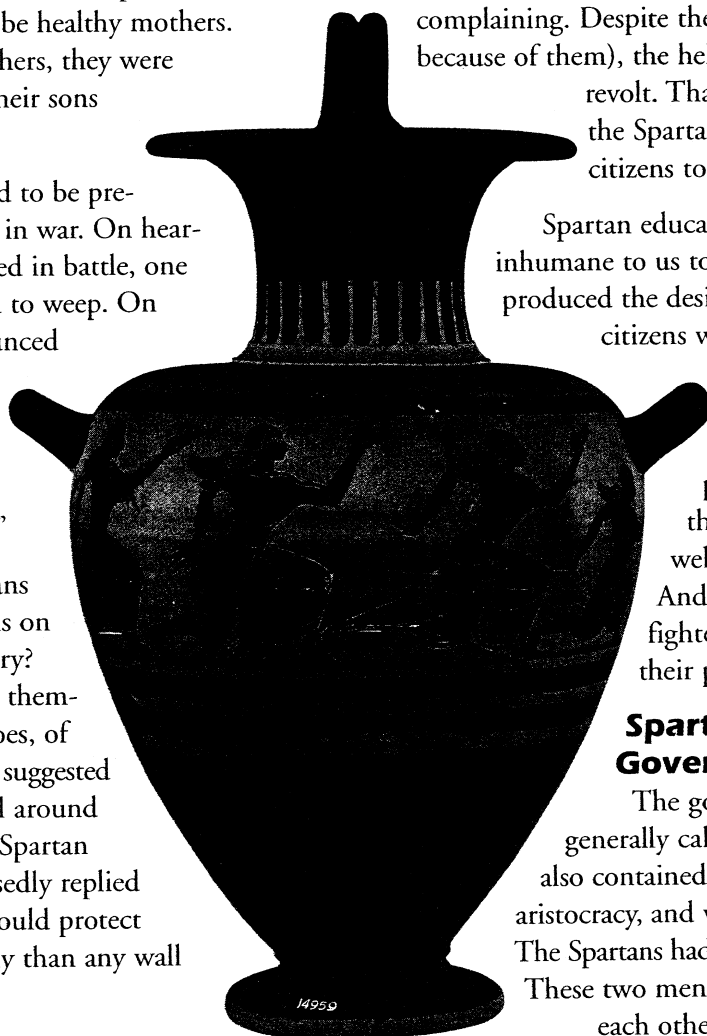
citizens. That was not a problem in Sparta. Although the *helots* outnumbered Spartan citizens almost ten to one, the Spartans treated the *helots* like farm animals. The *helots* were forced to toil away on state-owned farms. They were beaten regularly and could be put to death for complaining. Despite these rules (or perhaps because of them), the *helots* sometimes rose in revolt. That was another reason the Spartans forced all male citizens to be warriors.

Spartan education seems cruel and inhumane to us today, but the process produced the desired results. Spartan citizens were patriotic, disciplined, and tough. They cared less about their own personal well-being than they did about the well-being of the state. And they were matchless fighters, willing to defend their polis to the death.

## Spartan Government

The government of Sparta is generally called an oligarchy, but it also contained elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and very limited democracy. The Spartans had not one but two kings. These two men were supposed to keep each other from becoming corrupt tyrants. They were also in charge of the all-important army. In addition to the kings, there was also an aristocratic council of elders and an Assembly, though this last

body was much less democratic than the one in Athens. Citizens were not allowed to debate an



*Spartan women were encouraged to participate in sports. This vase and the design at the bottom of the page show women competing in a foot race.*



issue, only to approve or disapprove, and they showed their approval or disapproval not with a show of hands but by shouting for or against a measure.

Spartan elections were handled in the same way. Citizens were called together in an open field and asked to shout for the candidate they preferred. Judges listened to see which candidate got the loudest shouts. (The Athenians found all this shouting very humorous.)

Although the Spartans accepted a few democratic ideas, they were generally skeptical about Athenian-style democracy. They believed that their traditional way of life was better than the Athenian way of life.

### Contrasting Lifestyles

The Athenians enjoyed symposiums with good food and wine. The Spartans saw such luxuries as dangerous distractions. They believed in keeping life simple. Spartan cooks were even told not to make the food too tasty. And apparently they succeeded. After eating dinner in Sparta, one visitor said, "Now I know why they aren't afraid to die in battle!" The only "fun" activity the Spartans allowed was dancing, and this was only tolerated because the elders thought dancing improved a soldier's footwork.

The Athenians trained their citizens to be skilled in rhetoric and public speaking. Spartans, on the other hand, were famous for avoiding long speeches. You may know the English word *laconic*. This word means "concise" or "of few words." What you may not know is that in ancient Greece, *laconic* was a synonym for *Spartan*. The Spartans were famous for their brief replies. Once a Greek from a hostile city-state told a Spartan, "If we defeat you, we will destroy your city." The Spartan spoke only one word in reply: "If." Now that's laconic!

Athens was a culturally rich city that eventually produced some of the greatest art and literature of all time. A great Athenian statesman once explained that Athenians saw no conflict between strength and beauty: "Our love of what is beautiful does not lead to extravagance; our love of the things of the mind does not make us soft." By contrast, the Spartans worried that too much attention to the "things of the mind" might make them soft. They chose to produce soldiers, not artists. Unlike Athens, Sparta left behind few cultural achievements.

Whereas Athens was located only four miles from the sea, Sparta was an inland city. This inland location may have encouraged the Spartans to isolate themselves from the rest of the world. In any case, that is what they tried to do. Whereas Athens welcomed foreigners, Sparta tried to keep them away so that they could preserve their traditional ways and highly ordered society. The Spartans even avoided using silver and gold coins, since these had a tendency to attract foreign merchants. Instead, they used iron bars, which nobody but a Spartan could possibly want.

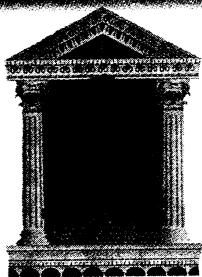
Location also helped determine the military differences between these two city-states. The landlocked Spartans generally had a small navy, or none at all, but their army was the best in Greece. Athens tried to excel in both land and sea warfare, but the Athenian navy was especially strong.

Sparta and Athens were so different that each city-state was suspicious of the other, and it was hard for the two to get along. The rivalry between these two city-states would play an important role in Greek history. In the next few lessons, you will read about a couple of occasions when Athens and Sparta did manage to cooperate and also about a fateful war in which they confronted one another on the battlefield.





# 4 The Olympic Games



**Sports Obsession** Athens and Sparta were not the only Greek city-states that had trouble getting along. There were lots of feuds and fights among the city-states. However, the Greeks did manage to lay their quarrels aside for a few things, and one of those things was sports.

One of the most famous athletic competitions was held in the city of Olympia, not far from Sparta. Every fourth year the Olympic Games would be held. Several months before the games began, a sacred engraved disk—the emblem of the games—was carried to all the Greek city-states that were expected to compete. The messenger who brought the disk would inform everyone when the games would be held. The messenger would also explain the terms of the Olympic **truce**. The city-states agreed to stop fighting during the time it took for athletes to travel to Olympia, attend the games, and return home again. This took one to three months.

## In the Beginning

The Olympic Games actually began as part of a religious festival in honor of Zeus. The festival originally included processions and religious ceremonies. In 776 B.C. a footrace was added. Contestants ran the length of the stadium, about 200 yards. Later, additional events were added, and the Olympic Games became a regular event.

The official prize for winning an athletic event at the Olympics was a wreath of olive leaves, which was placed on the head of the victor. But the real prize was honor. A victorious athlete would almost certainly become a hero in his native city-state. He might even be immortalized in songs or sculptures.

An interesting fact about the early Olympics is that the competitors generally dressed as the Athenians did in their gymnasiums, which is to say they wore no clothing at all—not even shoes! The Greeks did not mind a little nudity, and the runners didn't want to be slowed down by clothing.

As for the spectators, they sat on the sloping hillsides near the stadium, watching and cheering for their favorite athletes. But only

free males and unmarried priestesses were allowed to watch. Slaves and other women who were caught looking could be put to death.

Greek citizens came to the games from all parts of the known world. Like modern sports fans, they came to marvel at athletic excellence and experience the thrill of victory. They cheered for the athletes of their own city-state but also for skillful athletes from other city-states.

## Early Athletic Events

Most of the original athletic contests were based on the physical skills that the ancient Greeks needed for survival. Since there were many wars, it was important that Greek men learn to throw the javelin (a kind of spear), run quickly, wrestle well, and ride a horse.

At least two of the early Olympic events involved throwing the javelin. In one competition, athletes threw the javelin for distance; in another they threw for accuracy. In this last event it appears that competitors had to throw the javelin at a target while galloping past on a horse. This required strength, balance, and coordination.

Another event was the discus throw. The discus was shaped a bit like a Frisbee, but it was made of stone, iron, lead, or bronze. Each discus weighed about 14 pounds. Throwing a discus

### vocabulary

**truce** an agreement where two or more people agree to stop fighting

demanding that the athlete hold it tucked in his hand, swing it back and then forward, and release it at just the right time. Athletes competed to see who could throw the discus the farthest.

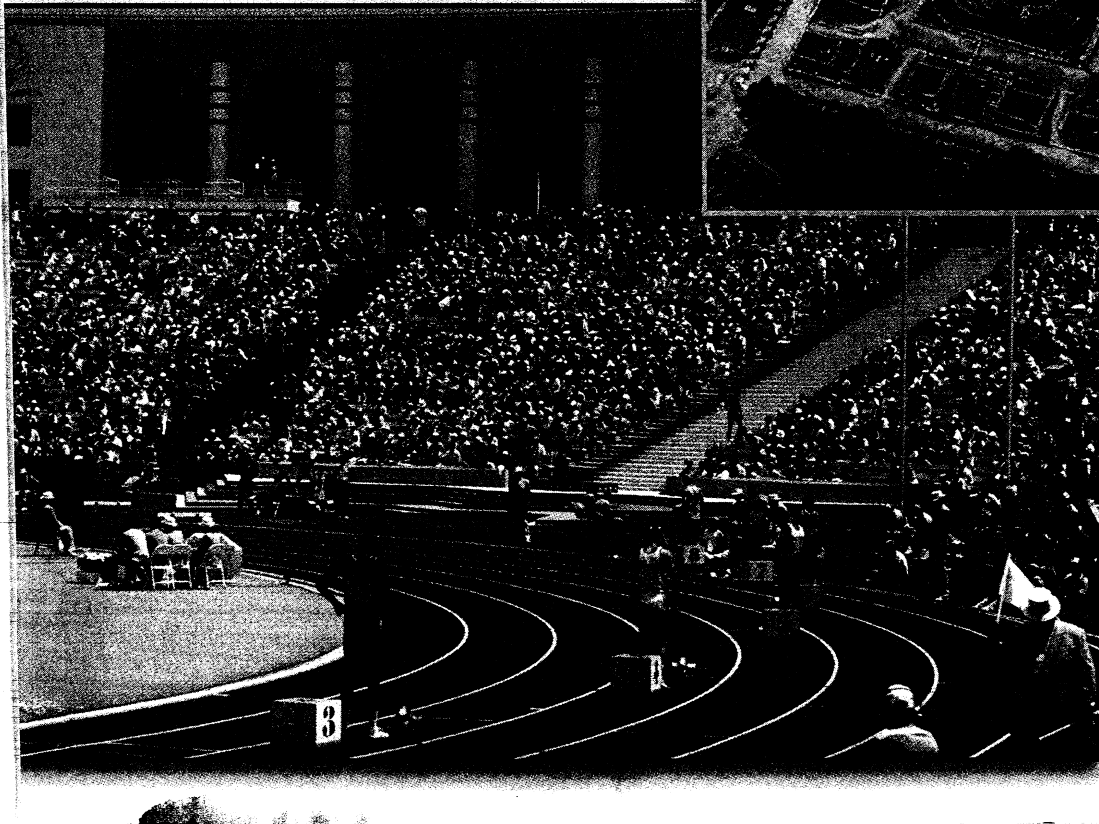
The long jump was meant to see who could jump the farthest. Unlike today's long jump, the ancient Greek athletic event involved carrying weights while jumping. The weights were made of stone or metal. They were shaped like dumbbells and weighed 4 to 8 pounds.

The pentathlon consisted of five events: discus, javelin, long jump, wrestling, and a 200-yard footrace.

The pankration (pahN KRAH tee awn) was a kind of wrestling event that had no rules, except that biting and sticking your fingers into your opponent's eyes were not allowed. Competitors were allowed to twist arms, throw punches, and generally beat up on their opponents.

Many different kinds of foot races were held. In addition to the 200-yard race, there was a 400-yard race and another competition in which competitors had to run 400 yards while wearing helmets and shin guards and carrying a shield.

*The modern Olympic Games carry on traditions that began almost 3,000 years ago.*

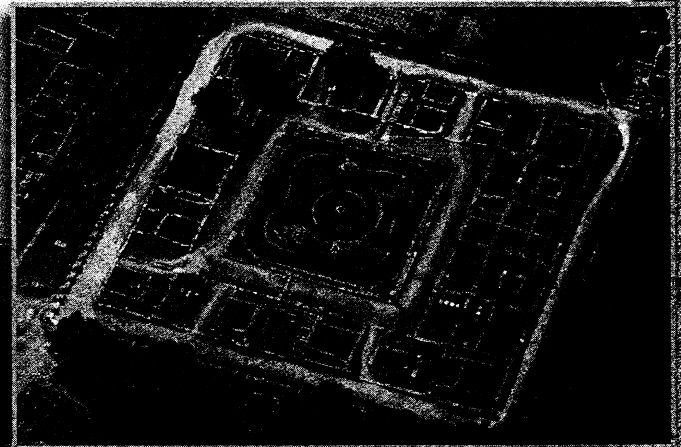


## Down Through the Ages

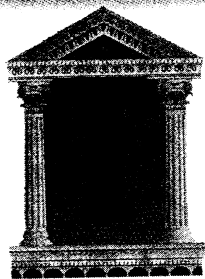
The Olympic Games continued for centuries, even through much of the time that the Roman Empire ruled Greece. Finally, in A.D. 393, after more than a thousand years of competition, the Roman emperor Theodosius I (thee oh DOH shee us) canceled the games. He was a Christian and did not like the religious rites in honor of Zeus that were still a part of the Olympics.

It was not until the late nineteenth century that the games were begun again. The first of the modern Olympic Games were held in 1896, in a new stadium built in Athens. Ever since, the Olympics have been held every four years, except during World War I and World War II. Nowadays, people from all over the world participate. The modern games include many more events than the ancient games, but the ancient Greek love of physical fitness, skill, and courage lives on in today's Olympics.

*These ruins in Olympia, Greece are where the ancient Olympic Games were held.*



# 5 The Persian Wars



**The Beginning of the War** In the first lesson you learned that there were a number of Greek city-states on the coast of Asia Minor. About 546 B.C. these city-states came under the control of the Persians, who appointed harsh tyrants to rule each city-state.

Around 499 B.C. the city-state of Miletus (mye LEET us) rebelled against Persian rule. The people of Miletus asked the Greeks in other city-states to help them overthrow the Persians. The Spartans refused, but the Athenians agreed to help.

In 498 B.C., the Athenians crossed the Aegean Sea to Asia Minor. They conquered the Persian-controlled city of Sardis. When the other Greek city-states in Asia Minor saw that Athens was victorious, they decided to join in the revolt against the Persians.

The Athenians felt their point had been made, and they went home. Within three years, the Persian king Darius had put down the revolt and regained control of the Greek city-states in Asia Minor.

Even though they had regained control of their empire, the Persians were angry with the Athenians. In 490 B.C. the Persians crossed the Aegean Sea to punish the Athenians.

## Marathon

The Athenians and Persians met on the plain at Marathon, about 26 miles from Athens. The Athenians were badly outnumbered, but they decided to

attack. The Greek charge was a success. The Persians broke ranks and fled to their ships, and the Greeks cut them down as they ran. By the end of the battle, more than 6,000 Persians were dead, while only 192 Greeks had fallen.

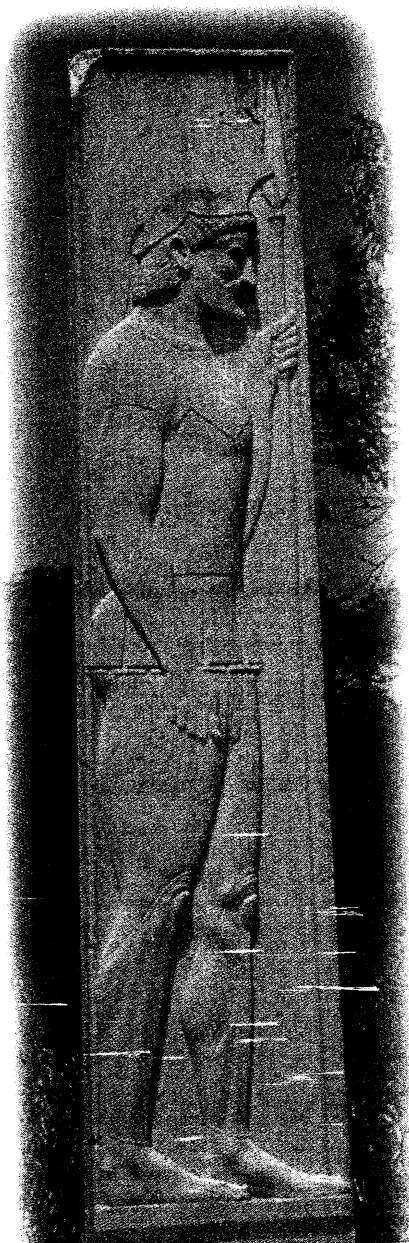
According to legend, the Greeks ordered a messenger to run to Athens and deliver news of the victory. The messenger ran the 26 miles to Athens, gasped out his victory announcement, "Rejoice, we conquer!" and died of exhaustion. Today, we use the word *marathon* to refer to a 26-mile footrace that is run in the modern Olympics.

Marathon was an extremely important battle. Because the Athenians won, they were filled with self-confidence. They began to think that they were the most powerful of all the Greeks.

## Thermopylae

The Persians were not yet done with the Athenians. In 480 B.C. another Persian army was dispatched to defeat the Greeks. With an army of more than 100,000 men as well as 600 to 700 ships, the Persian king Xerxes (ZURK seez) (486–465 B.C.) was determined to conquer all of Greece.

*This monument in Marathon commemorates an Athenian warrior who fought there.*





Athens and Sparta put aside their disagreements and united against the Persians. They were joined by a few other city-states. The Greeks had between 200 and 300 ships and an army of 10,000 men. The army was led by King Leonidas (lee AHN uh dus) of Sparta.

The Greeks realized that the longer they could put off a major battle, the better their chances would be. The Greeks decided to delay the Persian army by engaging them at a place called Thermopylae (thur MAHP uh lee), about 75 miles northwest of Athens. Thermopylae was a narrow pass between high cliffs and the sea. Because the pass is so narrow, only part of the huge Persian army could attack at one time, and the Greeks might be able to hold the pass.

Things did not turn out exactly as planned. Leonidas and his troops showed great courage and managed to hold the pass for two days, but a traitor showed the Persians how to use a mountain path to slip around the Greeks. When Leonidas realized what had happened, he ordered the majority of the Greeks to retreat, while he and 300 Spartans stayed behind to hold back the Persian army. All 300 of the Spartans died defending the pass.

## Salamis

The heroism of the Spartan troops slowed the Persian army but did not stop it. Xerxes marched south to Athens and burned the city to the ground. Fortunately, most of the citizens had been warned that Xerxes was coming and had evacuated.

After the burning of Athens, the Persians were set to conquer all of southern Greece. Xerxes decided to lead with his navy. The two fleets clashed near an island called Salamis (SAL uh mihs). The Persians had big ships, but the Greeks knew the waterways better than the Persians did. The Athenian navy lured the Persian fleet into shallow waters. There, the Greek ships rammed and sank the Persian ships. The Greeks had also filled their boats with soldiers, who attacked the men on board the Persian ships. These tactics enabled the Athenian navy to defeat the huge Persian fleet.

Stunned by this unexpected defeat, Xerxes immediately left Greece and sailed home. The next year, 479 B.C., the Spartan general Pausanias (paw SAY nee us) led the Greeks against the Persians in the battle of Plataea (pluh TEE uh). Pausanias won the battle and drove the Persian army out of Greece.

*Based on ancient sources, this nineteenth-century painting shows the Battle of Salamis between the Greeks and the Persians. The Greeks were victorious.*

